



► [Latest Metro/State reports](#)

► [Previous Story](#)

► [Next Story](#)



Tuesday, September 2, 2003

**detnews**  
SITE INDEX

[Homepage](#)  
[Search](#)  
[CyberSurveys](#)  
[Horoscope](#)  
[Lottery](#)  
[Michigan's Best](#)  
[Weather](#)  
[Staff](#)

#### FORUMS

[News Talk](#)  
[Autos Talk](#)  
[Big 10 Talk](#)  
[High Schools](#)  
[Lions Talk](#)  
[Pistons Talk](#)  
[Wings Talk](#)  
[Tech Talk](#)  
[Tiger Talk](#)  
[Weight-loss](#)

#### NEWS

[Autos](#)  
► [Insider](#)  
► [Consumer](#)  
► [Joyrides](#)  
[Business](#)  
► [Careers](#)  
► [Money & Life](#)  
[Census](#)  
[Columnists](#)  
[Commuting](#)  
[Detroit History](#)  
[Editorials](#)  
[Metro / State](#)  
► [Livingston](#)  
► [Macomb](#)  
► [Oakland](#)  
► [Wayne](#)  
[Nation / World](#)  
[Obituaries](#)



Morris Richardson II / The Detroit News

**Low water levels have hurt the value of some lakefront properties, but homeowners along Lake Erie have seen the level at least temporarily return to its long-term average. Rain this fall and snow pack this winter would offer a further boost.**

Rising lakes St. Clair and Erie buoy Mich. boaters

By Gene Schabath / *The Detroit News*

**NEWPORT** -- Boaters on Lake Erie enjoyed a good summer of cruising and sailing because of a condition that's been absent in recent years -- rising water levels.

After a half-decade of drought, the relatively rainy summer of 2003 began to gradually fill lakes Erie and St. Clair. After remaining well below 2002 levels for most of this year, Erie now is slightly above last year's level. St. Clair is closing the gap.

The upper Great Lakes remain well below long-term averages. But the recent rise in water levels and the prospect of wetter weather this fall



Morris Richardson II / The Detroit News

**Businesspeople such as Shellie Berns, manager of Brest Bay Marina in Newport, hope that the damaging six-year siege of low Great Lakes levels is coming to an end.**

#### Low water's toll

Some of the consequences of falling water levels on the Great Lakes:

\* The recreational boating industry suffers. Some boats are landlocked, others can't reach familiar destinations, the boating

Metro/State

- [Metro/State index for Tuesday, September 2, 2003](#)
- [Rising lakes St. Clair and Erie buoy Mich. boaters](#)
- [Pilot school anti-terror law repealed](#)
- [Rain trims crowds at outdoor Metro events](#)
- [Awestruck piano student meets Stevie](#)
- [Vessel passages at Detroit](#)
- [Allegan County to start farmland preservation program](#)
- [Mobile home park foes unite](#)
- [Holiday weekend, weather stir festive spirit in crowds](#)
- [U-M changes its admissions, but is money very well spent?](#)
- [Warren politics aside, mayor deserves a hand](#)
- [Belittle a Mini? No way](#)

Around Michigan

- [District hires 10 despite liability](#)  
-- from the Battle Creek Enquirer
- [Many musicians, one new home](#)  
-- from the Battle Creek Enquirer
- [Proposed plea deal rejected in death penalty case](#)

► [Death Notices](#)  
[Politics / Govt.](#)  
[Real Estate](#)  
[Religion](#)  
[Schools](#)  
[Special Reports](#)  
[Technology](#)

## SPORTS

[Sports Insider](#)  
► [Lions/NFL](#)  
► [Red Wings/NHL](#)  
► [Pistons/NBA](#)  
► [Shock/WNBA](#)  
► [Tigers/Baseball](#)  
► [MSU](#)  
► [U-M](#)  
[More Colleges](#)  
[Golf Guide](#)  
[High Schools](#)  
[Motor Sports](#)  
[Outdoors](#)  
[More Sports](#)  
[Scoreboards](#)

## ENTERTAINMENT

[Entertainment](#)  
► [Casino Guide](#)  
► [Movie Finder](#)  
► [Restaurants](#)  
► [TV Listings](#)  
[Crossword](#)

## GREAT LAKES ESCAPES

[Home](#)  
► [Destinations](#)  
► [Hunt & Fish](#)  
► [On the Water](#)  
► [Recreation](#)

## HOMESTYLE

[Homestyle home](#)  
► [Decorating](#)  
► [Eats & Drinks](#)  
► [Recipe Box](#)  
► [Gardening](#)  
► [Health](#)  
► [Home Improvement](#)  
► [Home Life](#)  
► [Home Tech](#)

and winter are encouraging to those who rely on the Great Lakes for recreation or livelihoods. They're beginning to hope that the damaging six-year siege of low water is finally coming to an end.

"It turned out to be real nice this summer," said Phil Teal, owner of Brest Bay Marina in Newport, near Monroe. "They had been forecasting that it (water levels) would be low this year but it didn't turn out that way.

"We should be set the rest of the year, and hopefully we will have a normal spring and be back to normal next year," said Teal, who has operated the marina for 30 years. "Hopefully, we are done with the low-water cycle. I had to dredge two years ago, but I won't have to this year or next season."

Low water levels have had substantial economic impact: Pleasure boats have been landlocked, the boating season has been shortened, lakes freighters have been forced to lighten cargos and take more trips, and lakefront and canal-front properties in many areas have lost value. Experts say it's too early to declare that the down cycle is over, and forecasters don't agree on the outlook for more abundant rain and snow this year and next.

Erie, and all of the Great Lakes except Ontario, have been in a free fall since 1997 because of dry weather. Relatively mild winters in several of those years didn't help -- the lack of ice cover allowed year-round water loss through evaporation.

Lake Erie had dropped 3.1 feet since 1997, the largest decline over a six-year period since hydrologists started keeping records in 1860, said Cynthia Sellenger, hydrologist with the Great Lakes Environmental Research Laboratory in Ann Arbor. It is one of 12 labs across the country run by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Lake Erie's water levels did reach the long-term average for this time of year a few weeks back, but that's as high as it will get, Sellenger said.

"Today, Lake Erie is at the long-term average --- that is good," Sellenger said. "But that was only for a short time. It's going back down, and it definitely will stay below the long-term average."

### Lakes need rain, snow

The key to lake levels is heavy precipitation, mainly in the upper Great Lakes and southern Canada, said Marie Strum, water resource engineer with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Detroit. Cold temperatures that keep ice on the lakes and prevent evaporation is another factor, Strum said.

"Rain in the fall and snow pack in the winter is what drives this system," Strum said. "To bring these levels up, we would need long-term

season is shortened and commercial marinas suffer loss of business.

\* Commercial shipping is hobbled. Cargo freighters must carry lighter loads and make more trips, increasing their costs and business.

\* Many homes and cottages on the Great Lakes and connecting waterways and canals see reductions in property value.

\* Environmental risks are increased. Increased dredging stirs polluted lake bottoms, potentially spreading toxic substances.

\* Altered lake shores threaten some life forms, enhance others.

► [Comment on this story](#)  
► [Send this story to a friend](#)  
► [Get Home Delivery](#)

-- from WZZM 13 Grand Rapids

● [Wyoming Teacher Accused of Giving Former Student Marijuana](#)  
-- from WZZM 13 Grand Rapids

● [4 line up for Cottrellville trustee post](#)  
-- from the Port Huron Times Herald

● [Stylin' Pilings will likely stick around](#)  
-- from the Port Huron Times Herald

● [Fowlerville benefit aims to help kids with grief](#)  
-- from the Lansing State Journal

● [Conservancy files new suit against Bath development](#)  
-- from the Lansing State Journal

---

Copyright © 2003  
The Detroit News.  
Use of this site indicates  
your agreement to the  
[Terms of Service](#) (updated  
12/19/2002).

[Wine Report](#)

## PHOTOS

[Sports](#)

[Red Wings](#)

[Lions](#)

[Autos](#)

[Joyrides](#)

[News](#)

[History](#)

precipitation, including rain in the fall and snow pack in the winter.

Lake Erie did benefit from local storms this spring and winter, she said.

"There were quite a few storm systems that tracked to the south, and that gave Lake Erie the boost this summer," Strum said.

That may be a milestone for the local climate. Experts say there are indications that the long pattern of drought has been broken.

Bill Deedler, a climatologist with the U.S. Weather Service in White Lake Township, said there are "equal chances" for precipitation being below or above normal this fall.

"I would say it is not hopeful for a wet fall," Deedler said.

He doesn't make predictions beyond three months, but there is a glimmer of hope for heavy snow this winter from Environment Canada, a government-run environmental agency that also does weather forecasting, he said.

"They are predicting normal to above normal (precipitation) for the upper Great Lakes," Deedler said. "That's encouraging. That would help with the lake levels if they are right."

Strum said another promising factor is that this summer was comparatively cooler than most. Typically, evaporation from the lakes reaches a peak during the fall, but rates of evaporation usually are lower when autumn follows a cool summer, she said.

### **Rough boating**

Longtime boater Steve Saph Sr., of Cottreville near Algonac, can't wait for the low-water cycle to end.

Saph, an insurance agent who has been boating for 42 years, said the low lake levels have meant some rough boating in Lake St. Clair and the St. Clair River. Lake St. Clair is 7 inches below last year's levels, and is expected to remain as much as 13 inches below the long-term average, Sellenger said.

"I can barely get out of my marina on the St. Clair River near Cottreville," Saph said. Saph has an antique 26-foot Lyman built in the 1960s. "There has been a tremendous loss of income to marinas. But the high water cycle will come back."

Lake Michigan-Huron -- regarded as one lake for water level purposes -- is 11 inches below 2002 and Lake Superior is 4 inches below last year. Lake Ontario is 2 inches above 2002, but artificial controls on the St. Lawrence Seaway play a major role in its depth.

"But the fact that the levels remain significantly above the record lows is a good sign," Strum said. "You have to remember this is a natural part of the Great Lakes system and we are highly dependent on the weather."

Strum said there is one consolation. The recent drought hasn't been as severe as in the 1930s and 1960s, when some of the lowest lake levels were recorded. And those periods were followed by high water cycles.

The lake levels were so high in the early 1970s, the Army Corps spent millions of dollars building sand bag dikes along some areas of the Great Lakes, such as Lake St. Clair and Lake Erie.

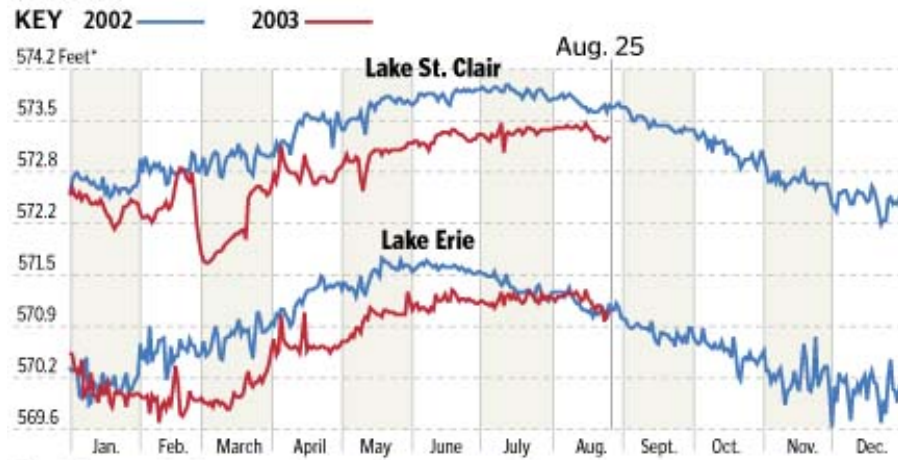
Teal, owner of Brest Bay Marina, remembers those days and hopes the levels will return.

"I like it when it is high."

You can reach Gene Schabath at (586) 468-3614 or [gschabath@detnews.com](mailto:gschabath@detnews.com).

## Lake levels rise

Lakes Erie and St. Clair have risen this summer compared to the same time last year.



\*Feet above sea level

Source: National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration water level data

*The Detroit News*

► [Previous Story](#)

► [Next Story](#)